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Samuel Hodgman

A PIONEER IN RUBBER

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE
CAREER OF

DANIEL HODGMAN

AND THE
STORY OF THE BUSINESS
WHICH HE FOUNDED,
THROUGH ITS

SEVENTY-FIVE YEARS OF EXISTENCE

TOGETHER WITH
A DESCRIPTION OF

THE GATHERING OF RUBBER

WILD AND CULTIVATED

GARDEN CITY NEW YORK
DOUBLEDAY, PAGE & COMPANY
MCMXIII

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HODGMAN RUBBER COMPANY

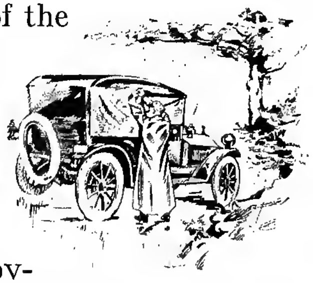
A PIONEER IN RUBBER

1838–1913

IT WOULD be hard to say how much rubber is the child, how much the parent, of present-day civilization. Rubber is the bed of birth, a source of solace to infancy, a giver of games and gladness to childhood, a maker of mirth to youth, an invaluable instrument of manhood's industry, an alleviator of the aches of age.

Rubber holds the steel point that writes the history of nations and it erases the rash words that work for war. With its protecting aid men have explored the depths of oceans, the black bowels of the earth, the waste waters that surround the land, and the cold caverns of the clouds. Rubber has put the wings of Mercury upon the heels of men, and the cloak of impenetrability between their bodies and the weapons of the weather.

The orderly business man at his desk is lulled by the harmonious music of the rubber band; the eager traveler hastens swiftly on his unwearied way in the glad knowledge that not he but his motor car is rubber tired. Rubber is the main spring of sport in football and in tennis. The urgencies of business are sped by messages over telephones that are rubber wired. And in a thousand ways rubber is an aide of the arts and a servitor of the sciences.



Rhetoric aside, this world would be a very different place than it is had Charles Goodyear failed to make his famous accidental discovery of the amalgamating effect of sulphur on crude rubber. And of the men who, in the business of rubber manufacture, made it a practical and enduring commodity, Daniel Hodgman was one who wrought a useful and honorable place among the pioneers. Furthermore, he founded the house that has the longest record in this country of continuous manufacture of this staple of modern life.

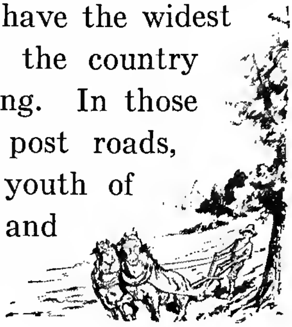
This year (1913) marks the seventy-fifth anniversary of the founding of the Hodgman business. As its history is contemporaneous with the history of the American rubber industry, this brief sketch is presented to its friends. It reveals some of the

GEORGE F. HODGMAN

characteristic changes in methods that have brought modern manufacturing of all kinds to its present high level of efficiency in both invention and merchandising.

Daniel Hodgman, the founder of the company, was typical of the hardy, adventurous youth of the first half of the nineteenth century. Born August 19, 1808, at Mason, N. H., he early felt the call to a wider field than lay at hand in a rural New England village. He had been indentured to a farmer, but he saw nothing in this life but a grim struggle with an unfriendly soil, and resolved to go out on his own initiative and trust to his own enterprise and daring to win a larger reward for his labors.

His first venture was a thread and needle store in Roxbury, Mass., which is now a part of the city of Boston. This, too, soon became an irksome routine. He would have the widest scope for his ingenuity that the country offered — New York or nothing. In those days of stage coaches and post roads, this was a bold step for a youth of twenty-two, without friends, and practically without funds, to essay. But, once having set



his mind upon it, he followed his purpose with dogged resolution. For three years he worked for William Atkinson in a rubber factory in New York, saving his small earnings and keeping his shrewd eyes open for the business opportunity that he patiently awaited.

The opportunity came in 1838. In partnership with a young man named Robinson he opened a store in Beaver Street for the sale of rubber goods at retail. The first year was evidently a hard one for the new firm, as the following extract from a letter, written at Ashby, N. H. on August 8, 1839, shows:

"We stopped one day in Providence and two days in Boston. I have not been able to sell but about thirty-eight dollars since I left New York. I never worked harder than I did in Providence and Boston. I sold most all that I did sell in Providence.

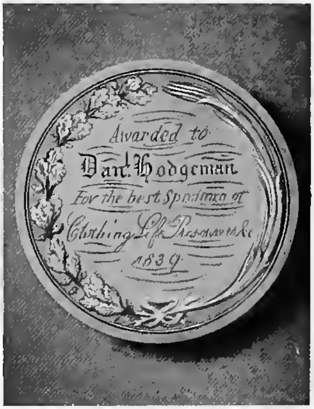
"I shall stop in Boston one or two days when I return but do not expect to sell any goods, but shall try. I have found in Boston some 9/9 yard drilling that would answer for Carriage Cloth: it is first rate and I would buy if I had money. Can get it for twenty-four cents per yard.

"I have paid out more money than I had taken, so you will see that I am now on credit and if I

CHARLES A. HODGMAN

do not sell any more goods I must come home on tick. I am very anxious to hear from you. I would like to know how you get along with business, &c. Write just how you get along. I shall not have any money to fetch home, so you must make the best arrangements you can to pay water, &c."

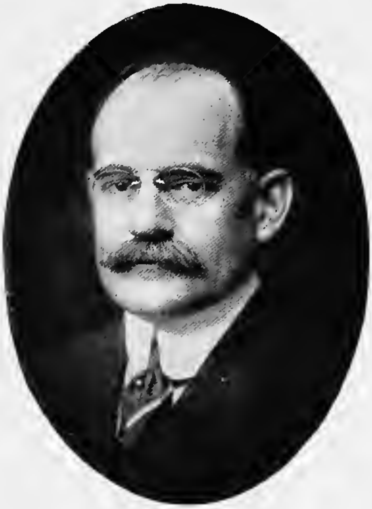
The prospect seems to have discouraged Robinson, for the partnership was dissolved and Daniel Hodgman went on with the business alone. But instead of depressing him, untoward events gave a lively rebound to his energy and resourcefulness. He took a larger store on Maiden Lane, branched out into manufacturing as well as merchandising, and even invented some of his own products. For one of these inventions, a new type of life preserver, he received a medal and



diploma at the Fair of the American Institute in New York in October, 1839. His factory was at 26th Street and East River. Here he made another invention, "a new and useful improvement on overshoes," as the letters patent, signed by Daniel Webster in 1842 described it. A pair of these overshoes, made in 1848, are still in the possession of the Hodgman Rubber Company. They look very much like a pair of dancing pumps and they are still in condition to wear, a a pretty good proof of the quality that Daniel Hodgman put into his products sixty-five years ago.

Enterprise was a distinguishing characteristic of Daniel Hodgman. He saw the value of advertising, and in the New York *Evening Post* of October 28, 1846, the following advertisement appeared:

> D. HODGMAN, Manufacturer and Dealer in India Rubber Goods, Warehouse, 27 Maiden Lane, New York. — India Rubber Carriage Cloth, Air Beds, Pillows, Cushions, Life Preservers, Life Belts and Life Jackets ; every variety of India Rubber Shoes, for Ladies and Gentlemen. Door Springs Shirred Suspenders, Macintosh Coats, Cloaks and Capes, India Rubber Caps, Pantaloons, Long and Short Boots, Wading Pantaloons, Water Bottles, Travelling Bags, Horse Covers, Plaster Cloth, Cloth for Garments, together with almost every description of India Rubber Goods. For sale wholesale and retail. o28



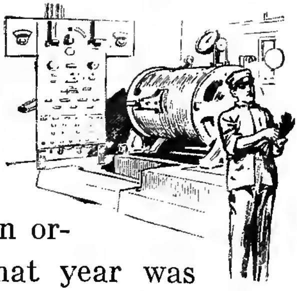
GEORGE B. HODGMAN
PRESIDENT

FRED. A. HODGMAN
VICE-PRESIDENT

S. T. HODGMAN
TREASURER

A. W. WARREN
SECRETARY

PRESENT OFFICERS OF THE HODGMAN RUBBER COMPANY



By the year 1849, Daniel Hodgman was firmly established in business, and had extended his trade into widely varying sections of the country. For example, an order dated August 26th of that year was obviously from a Southern plantation owner for some of his slaves who worked in marshy ground. It was from Merry-Hill P. O., North Carolina, and gave leg lengths and girth measures for rubber pants for "Harry, Owen, Bill, Plato, Jim B., Miles B., Nelson T., Bob, Sam S., Ned, Miles, Isaac, Jim, and Charles." Another letter dated the following day, August 27, 1849, came from Newbury, Vt., and read in part as follows:

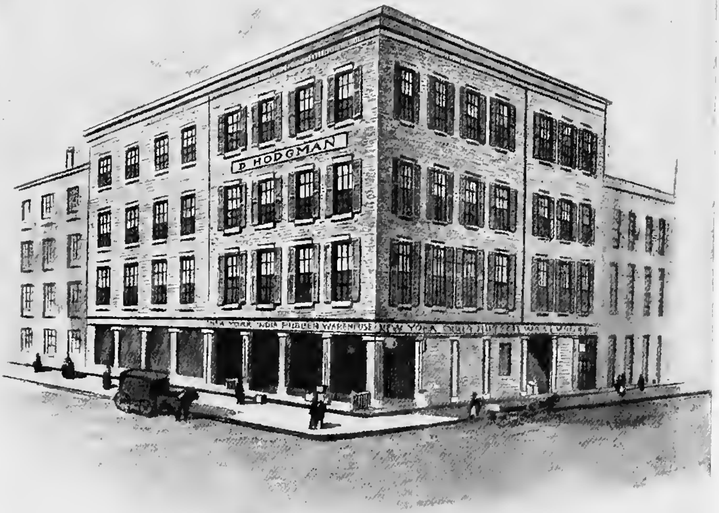
"We received your circular and would say that we think if you wish to establish a Northern Agency that we should be able to do as much as any House in our region, and would say that we think the largest Sales here would be Over Shoes and Boots, but presume a few Clothing Bags, Table Covers, Air Beds, and Cushions, Money Belts, Horse Fedders, Money Wallets, Baby Jumpers

(had a call for today), Syringes, Foot Balls, Artist Rubbers, Nursery Cloth, Elastics, Crumb Cloths, Shoulder Braces and Breast Pumps would sell.

"We have a large school here (about 200 scholars) and our other advantage for trade with Merchants, Pedlars, &c. North might make it an object for you to send us a small consignment at low prices."

And that was the year of the rush to the goldfields of California. Here again Daniel Hodgman's enterprise and ingenuity found expression, for he equipped hundreds of the Argonauts with rubber knapsacks bearing his name in bold letters, so that hardy prospectors carried the advertisement of his business to the camps on the American, the Sacramento, and the Merced rivers in the distant Land of Gold.

The manufacture of durable and serviceable rubber goods was a difficult undertaking in the early days, prior to the invention by Charles Goodyear of the process of vulcanization, which, broadly speaking, was the combination of rubber and sulphur under heat. Mr. Goodyear issued licenses for the manufacture of the various types of rubber goods then made, to the different manufacturers, and rubber door springs was one of the


D HODGMAN
NEW YORK INDIA RUBBER WAREHOUSE

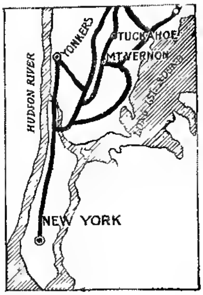
OLD STORE AT 27 MAIDEN LANE

lines assigned to Daniel Hodgman. This spring was a device similar to the coil spring now commonly used to close screen doors. The original license was assigned to Mr. Hodgman by Mr. H. B. Ames at a cost of $2,000, but he afterward made a direct contract with Mr. Goodyear himself under a royalty arrangement. This contract was in Mr. Goodyear's own handwriting and is still in the possession of the Hodgman Rubber Company.

It is worth while here to remark that Mr. Hodgman kept his own books, and the careful records of his business transactions still show, by their firm chirography and their painstaking exactitude, the character and system of their author. For example, in connection with this agreement with Goodyear, an old notebook shows this entry:

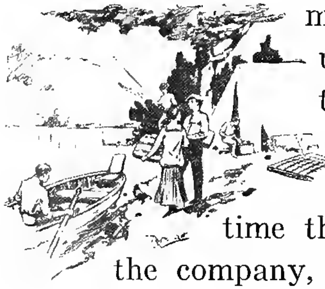
"Paid Charles Goodyear on Door Spring Tariff, 199.12½."

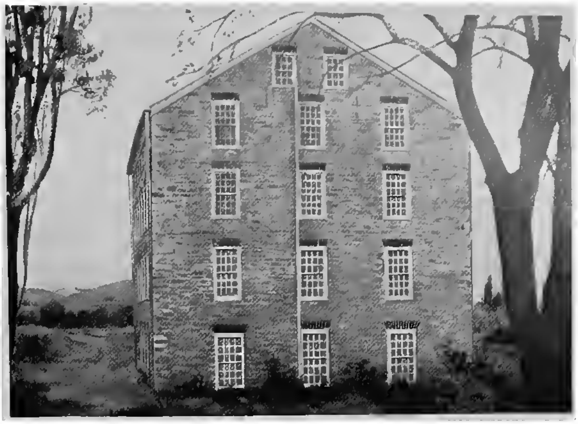
In 1853, Mr. Hodgman moved his factory to Tuckahoe, New York, where a stone cotton mill gave him larger quarters and cheap water power for his growing business. The purchase price of

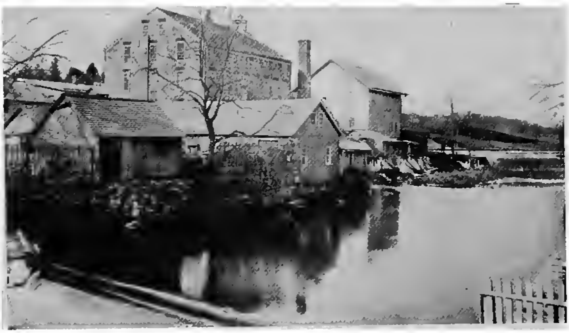


$10,000 brought him not only the mill but a large portion of the land that is now occupied by the village of Tuckahoe. Here in his new factory the working conditions were characteristic of the primitive conditions of those days. An old bell near the mill used to call the hands to work; and during the slack summer season, when there was little to do in the factory, the men were sent into the fields to put in the spare hours harvesting the crops. This old stone mill — which still stands and which, by the way, is 100 years old this year — was the foundation of the present Hodgman plant at Tuckahoe.

During the latter years of Daniel Hodgman's life he was training his two sons, George F. and Charles A., to take up the business after him. Indeed, during the last eight years of his life failing health compelled him to relinquish its management to them in great measure. Thus, when he died, they were equipped to carry the business on. Charles A. Hodgman was at that time the manufacturing expert of the company, and continued in charge of







FACTORIES AT TUCKAHOE, 1851 AND 1868

the constantly growing factories, keeping the technical side of the business abreast the best practice of the times, practically to his death. George F. Hodgman managed the financial and selling end of the business, living and making his headquarters in New York City. George F. Hodgman was admirably equipped for this work in the generation in which he was called. The crude, almost primitive New York in which Daniel Hodgman had hewed his success was becoming a great artistic and social centre as well as a commercial metropolis. The simple, almost rude virtues of Daniel Hodgman had been the ideal equipment of his time. But George F. Hodgman fitted better into the period of the '70's to '90's. He was a man of exceptional social gifts — suave, winning, and gracious, though possessed also of the sober sense and high integrity that are the solid groundwork of sound business success.

Under his hand the business entered a new era. The store was moved to 425 Broadway in 1879. In 1882, a new factory was built in Mt. Vernon, near the older factory at Tuckahoe, and equipped to handle exclusively the manufacture of mackintoshes and raincoats. This excursion into the raincoat field on a large scale was one of the epochal events in the manufacture of rubber goods. Before that event, raincoats were almost invariably heavy, unsightly, and of a very disagreeable odor. Some foreign raincoats of slightly better grade were imported into this country, but the best were neither comfortable nor beautiful. The Hodgmans, however, perfected a system of vulcanization that removed all traces of odor; they improved the quality so that very light goods could be made; they utilized the handsomest fabrics as the outer and inner coverings of the water-proofing; and, finally, they made these goods up into the latest styles, so that a mackintosh became not merely a garment of utility, but as distinguished for its appearance as for its serviceability.

George F. Hodgman worked out another policy that was part of the evolution of the present business. This was gradually to extend the range of the manufactures of the company so that nearly everything that it sold was of its own manufacture and consequently could be guaranteed as to quality.

And under his management a change was made

VIEWS OF FACTORY AT TUCKAHOE AND INTERIOR OF LABORATORY, 1913

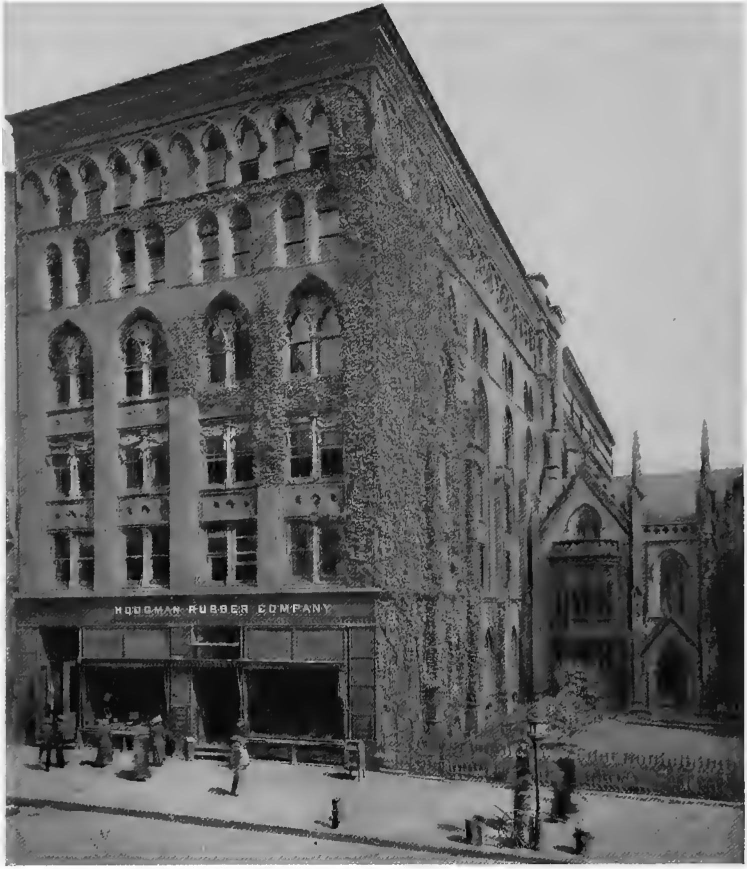
INTERIOR VIEWS OF FACTORY AT TUCKAHOE, 1913

to take advantage of the greater efficiency of the corporate form of ownership and control. Thus, in 1885, the business was incorporated under the name of the Hodgman Rubber Company, as it continues to be known to this day. He also moved the store, in 1903, to its present site at 806-808 Broadway, opposite Eleventh Street.

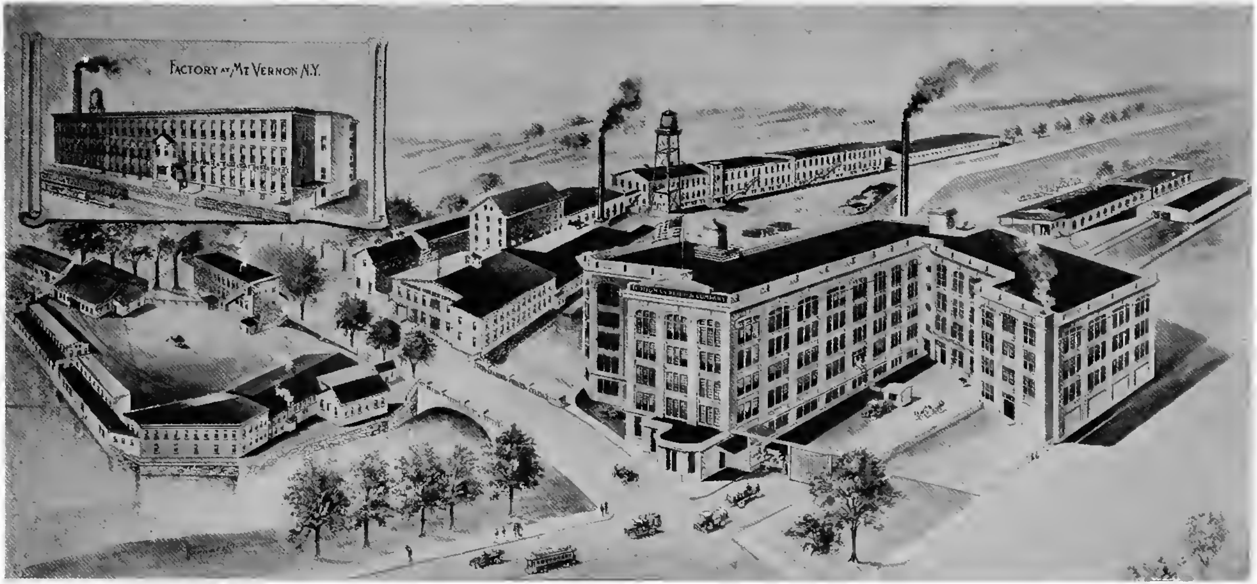
At George F. Hodgman's death, in 1906, Charles A. Hodgman became president. After three years ill health compelled him to relinquish the office, and the business then came into the hands of the third generation of Hodgmans, who now control it. George B. Hodgman, son of George F. Hodgman, was elected president, his brother S. Theodore Hodgman, treasurer, and F. A. Hodgman, son of the retiring president, vice-president. The direction of the manufacturing and selling end of the business is largely entrusted to A. W. Warren, who has grown with the company from manager of one small branch of the sales department to be secretary and general manager of the entire business.

The present management may be said to represent a third era in the evolution of the business. Of the modern methods they have introduced, only two need be cited to illustrate the advances that are typical of current manufacturing and merchandising generally. First, in the study of technical processes of manufacture: Daniel Hodgman and his contemporaries made what may be called empirical investigations to find better processes; that is, they made desultory experiments and once in a while they stumbled upon an improvement. That was the method of their day and they did the best they could. But with all the resources of modern science at their command, the present management would have been less than just to the business if they had not utilized these resources. They have utilized them, and to-day they maintain a completely equipped laboratory where every appliance of modern science is constantly employed to improve the processes and the quality of the manufactures.

Again, for Daniel Hodgman a few notebooks, kept with his own hand, sufficed for accounts. And indeed, many manufacturers to-day, even in this age of complicated organization, use a system of accounts that amounts to little more than merely a debit and credit account with their creditors and customers. But the Hodgman Rubber Company's system of accounting does much more than this. By a system of records that show the cost of every process, not merely in the items of raw material and labor, but in the items of rent, depreciation of machinery, etc., the officers of the company know what every article they sell costs



STORE AND EXECUTIVE OFFICES, 806-808 BROADWAY,
NEW YORK, 1913

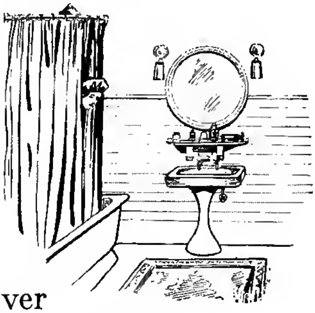

FACTORY AT MT VERNON N.Y.

FACTORIES AT TUCKAHOE AND MT. VERNON, 1913

them to make. This means more than appears at a glance: it means that they can make their price to their customers upon a scientific basis.

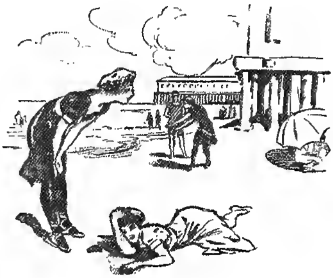
The factory at Tuckahoe, in which Daniel Hodgman's few employees shifted from grinding room and calendars to the corn-fields, has grown to a five-story reinforced concrete building surrounded by smaller buildings that have grown up in the last fifty years, maintaining at steady employment the year-round force which is the mainstay of the village.

The Company now manufactures a large and comprehensive line of rubber goods, which, broadly speaking, may be divided in three classes; Rain Coats and Rubber Surface Clothing; Druggist Sundries and Specialties, including among the latter Air Goods, Rubber Bands, Moulded Goods, etc.; Coated Cloth, including Hospital Sheetings and fabrics of various sorts for the manufacturing trade.



The cellar store in Beaver Street has grown to the largest rubber store in New York. And one man, of many who have spent their whole working lives in the employ of the Hodgman business, has seen the whole growth and is still on the Company's payroll. This is Mr. Frank De Frate, a great uncle of the present generation of Hodgmans, who has been with the company since 1846.

Twelve hundred and more employees and friends of the company, on June 28th of this year, were entertained by the management at an outing and barbecue at Glen Island, to which they were conveyed in special cars and trains and where they enjoyed a day of field sports, vaudeville, and feasting to celebrate the successful conclusion of seventy-five years of manufacturing in one industry under an unbroken line of management through three typical eras of American business.



SEVENTY-FIFTH ANNIVERSARY OUTING, JUNE 28, 1913

A FEW WORDS ABOUT CRUDE RUBBER

A FULL account of the manufacture of India-rubber would embrace almost the whole range of the arts and sciences, so numerous have been the applications of this wonderful substance to the service of man. It is now indispensable in the fields of electricity and chemistry, nearly so in vehicle traffic, steam engineering and mining, and generally helpful in every branch of work by adding to the comfort of the individual.

The manufacture of rubber goods is very far from being one concrete industry. It is in reality several separate industries that have two things in common; they all use rubber and they all use sulphur. Broadly speaking, this industry comprises thirteen specific lines, each using its own compounds and special machines, aside from the basic operations to prepare the crude rubber for manipulation, and the methods of manufacture of these lines are so widely divergent as to require special and individual study.

Crude rubber, which is the basis of this great industry, was referred to in a work by a Spanish writer in the early part of the sixteenth century, but this substance was not put to any practical use until the eighteenth century, and then in a very crude and unsatisfactory manner.

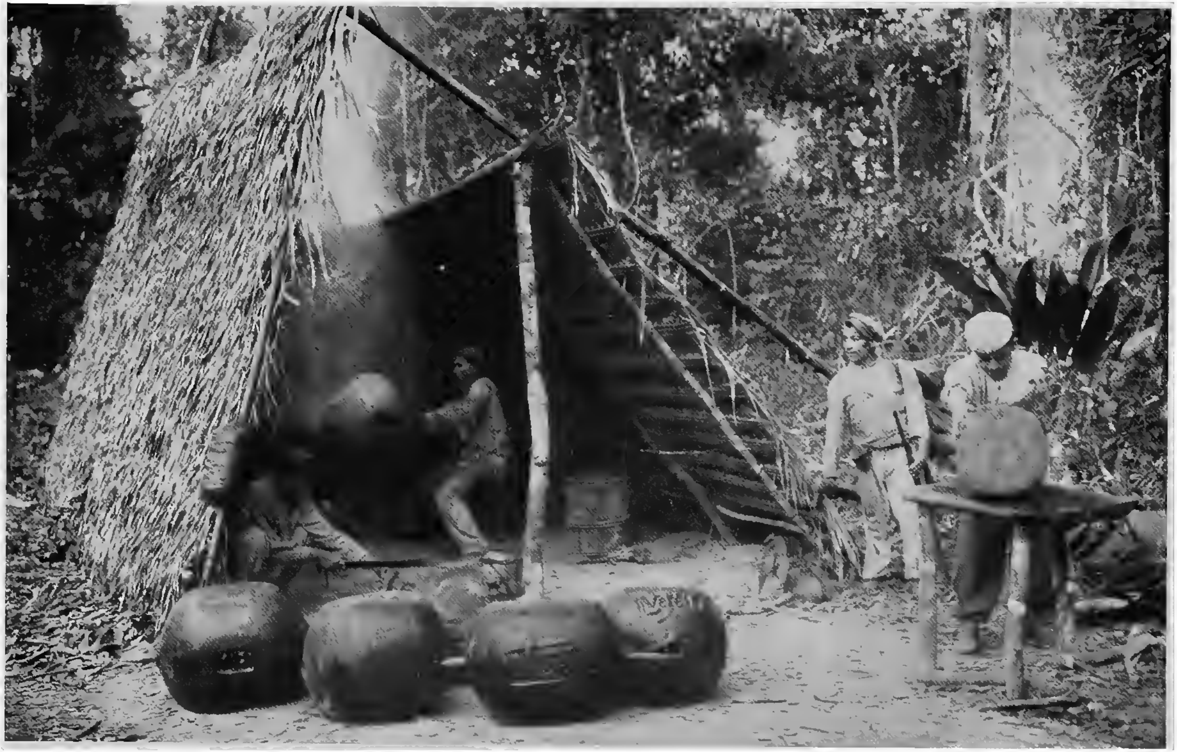
The name of India-rubber (the prefix has long been misleading) is due to the fact that in about 1770, Priestly, the discoverer of oxygen, recommended it for the purpose of erasing pencil marks; hence the term.

The real starting point, however, of the modern rubber industry appears to be about 1825, when Macintosh of Manchester, England, produced a waterproof garment by a practical but not a satisfactory process. The real development of the industry commenced in 1839 through the discovery, by Charles Goodyear, of the process of vulcanization, whereby through the combination of sulphur with rubber under heat the first absolutely reliable results could be obtained.

Up to within the past ten or fifteen years the crude rubber industry, from a broad standpoint, could be discussed in a comparatively few words, but with the changes and developments in recent years, this industry has grown to an extent hardly deemed possible a generation ago.

India-rubber of a sort can be found in the

TRUNK OF A RUBBER TREE. (BRAZIL)



SMOKING RUBBER LATEX ON THE UPPER AMAZON

tropical belt of every continent, but the finest quality, and that which is capable of producing the best results, still comes from the Amazon Valley, and is known as Para Rubber, named after the port that for so many years did all the exporting of this commodity. Brazil is unquestionably the greatest rubber producing country in the world, with its thousands of miles of great rivers emptying into the Amazon.

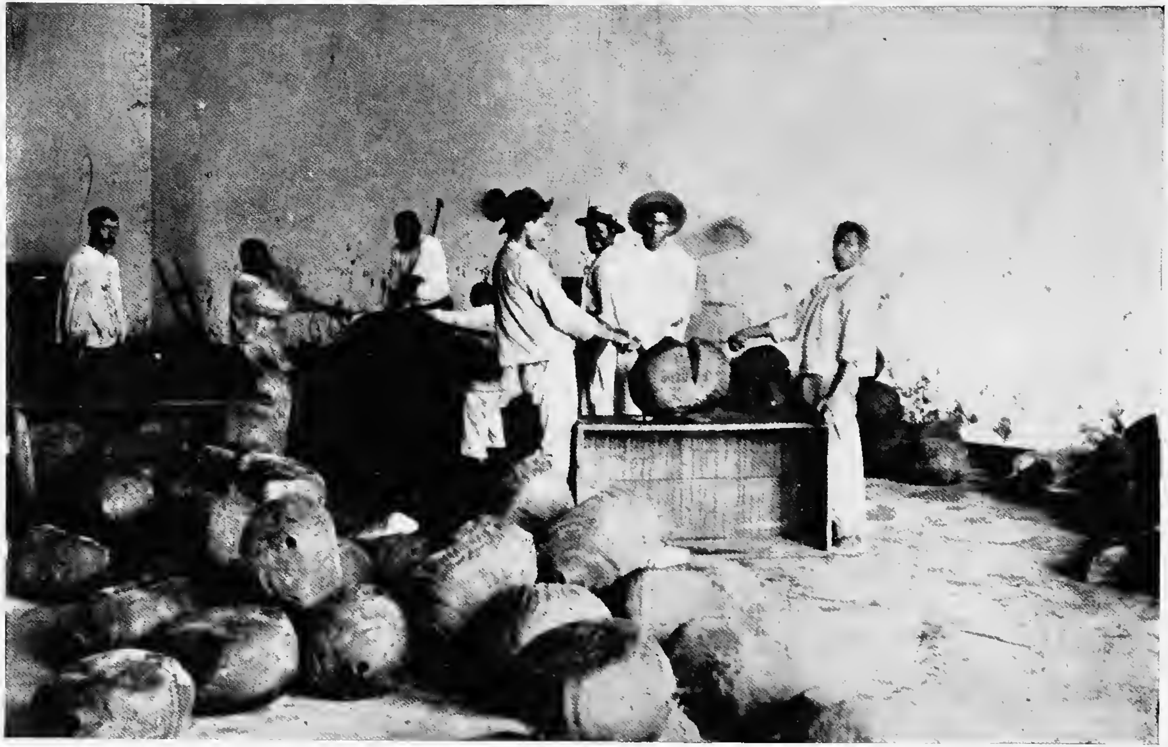
In this great Amazonian basin, densely forested, with soil of incomparable richness, watered by abundant and never-failing rains, and warmed by the equatorial sun, is the home of the tree that yields Para Rubber.

The business of collecting and marketing Para Rubber is rather unique, but is apparently suited to the people and conditions. A merchant in Para or Manaos finances the operation by furnishing the necessary supplies to the possessor of a rubber seringal (or concession) accepting notes for these advances. He receives the rubber from the seringal, charges a liberal commission for so doing, and any surplus goes as profit to the owner of the rubber estate.

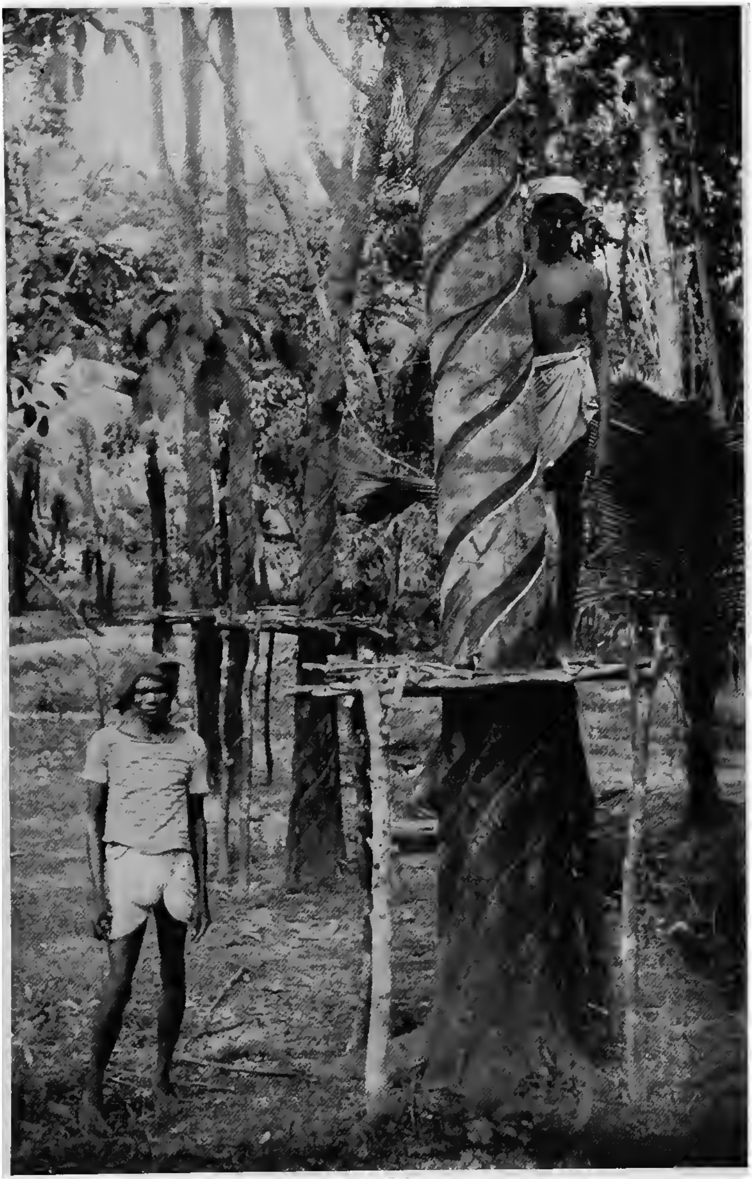
The latter pays the gatherers of the rubber, called Seringuieros, in what supplies they require at unusually extravagant prices, and they pay him in return in rubber, valued at one half the market price, and 50 per cent. for shrinkage. With the various charges added to a pound of rubber before it is shipped to the markets of the world, including the export tax imposed by the government, it is seen that the first cost is high.

The story of how Para Rubber is gathered has been often told, but chiefly is as follows: A man locates one hundred or more rubber trees, and cuts a path to them through the jungle, making the path return to his camp. He starts out in the morning with a hatchet and a lot of tin cups; he makes a few cuts on each tree, and sticks the cups underneath to catch the "latex," which is the name by which the sap of the tree is known. Later he collects this "latex" and pours it in a large vessel, and dips a paddle-shaped piece of wood into it, drying it in the dense smoke of a palm-nut fire, and repeats this process until he has a good size "biscuit" of rubber, which he cuts off the paddle, and it is then ready for the market.

The chief difficulty in the very large development of the Para Rubber industry is the inac-

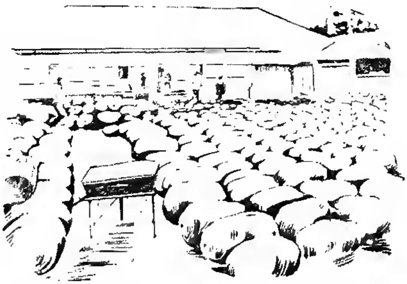


EXAMINING THE RUBBER. (BRAZIL)

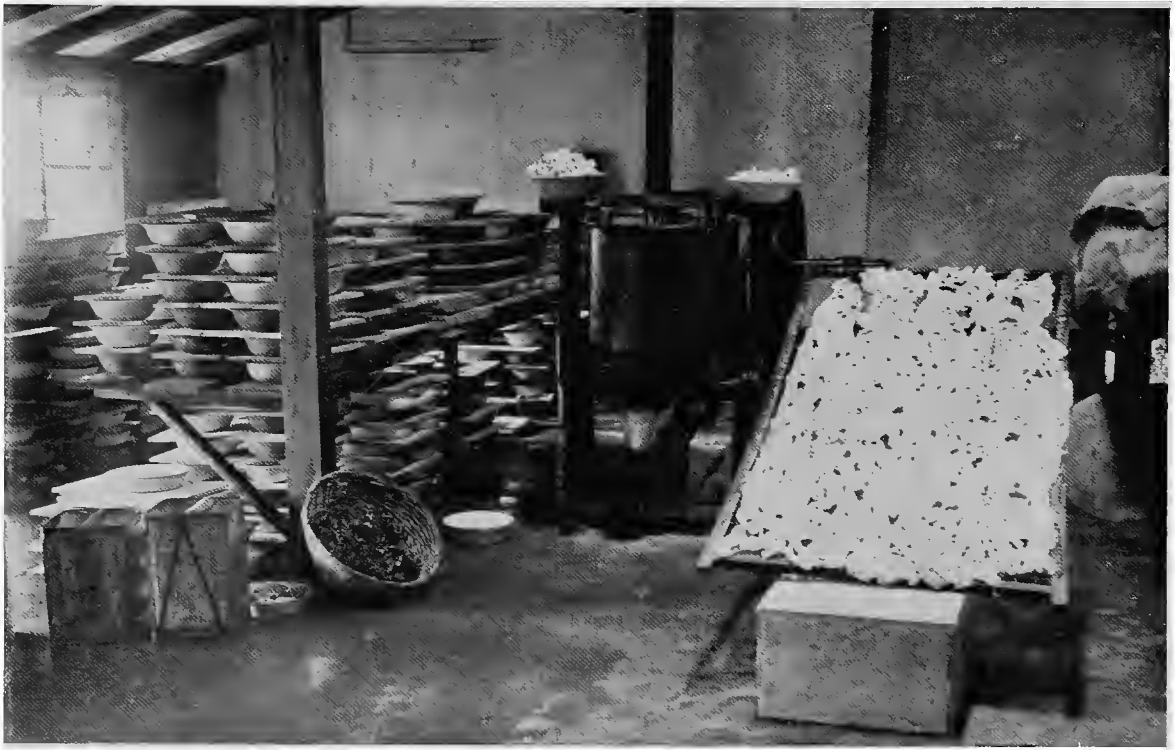


SPIRAL SYSTEM OF TAPPING. (FAR EAST)

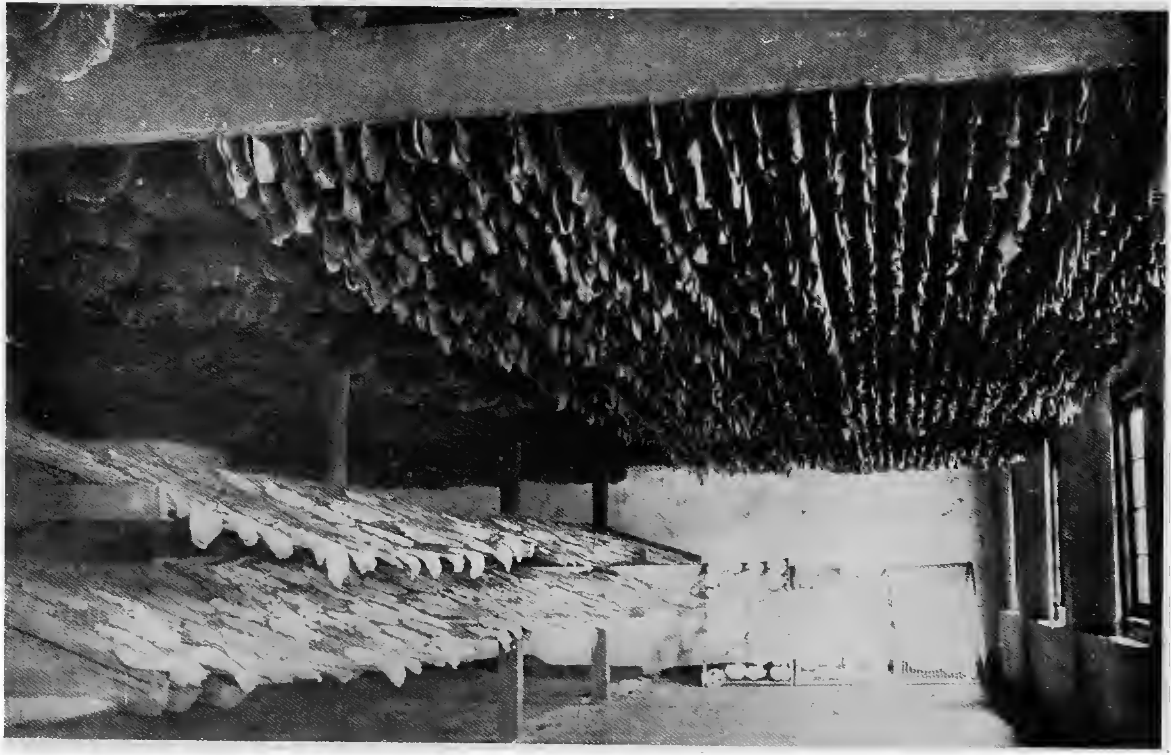
cessibility of the source of supply, and the difficulty in securing labor, and if the world had been obliged to depend upon Para Rubber entirely for its highest grade, the price of this would have become prohibitive on account of the greatly increased demand for rubber, due chiefly to the growth in the automobile industry. The Indian Government realizing that it might be possible to grow the tree from which Para Rubber is obtained (the botanical name of which is Hevea Brasiliensis), procured with great difficulty from the Amazon Valley a supply of seeds, and over thirty years ago began the planting in an experimental way. It was not, however, until some years after the beginning of the present century that this planting was undertaken on an industrial scale, but the importance of this undertaking and its result is shown in the fact that while in the year 1903 the production was approximately 42,000 pounds, it is estimated that in the year 1913 it will reach the astounding total of over 75,000,000 pounds.



This Plantation rubber, planted originally in Ceylon, and afterwards in the Federated Malay States, with the care exercised in preparing it for the market (although the methods of coagulation are different from those employed in Brazil) furnishes the rubber manufacturers a product that is second only in quality to Fine Para Rubber, in fact, in many instances it is fully equal to if not superior to Para for some purposes, and it is merely a question of time, depending upon the growth of the planted trees until their age approximates that of some of those in the wild forests, before this grade will stand equal with fine Para. The method of gathering this Plantation rubber is primarily, as far as the tapping of the trees and the gathering of the "latex" is concerned, the same as in Brazil, but with the accessibility of the plantations, and the improved machinery used in preparing the rubber for the market, there are advantages which Brazil does not enjoy, and one result of this competition has been the establishment of plantations in the Amazon Valley in accessible locations, where the conditions for handling are similar to those in the far East. It will thus be seen that the great Para Rubber industry bids fair in a comparatively



CORNER OF FACTORY ON RUBBER PLANTATION. (FAR EAST)



RUBBER DRYING ROOM. (FAR EAST)

short time to be obliged to take second place.

There are other sections of the world in the equatorial belt where rubber is found. Africa has been a great rubber producing country, being second only to Brazil until the advent of Plantation rubber in the far East, and in various other sections of the world rubbers are to be found, but none of them equal in grade to the Para and Plantation rubber.

It has often been shown in the history of industrial development that when a condition arises which would seem to bid fair to paralyze an industry, on account of an insufficient supply of basic material on which this industry thrives, that in some way provision is made to meet this condition, and it is so in the rubber industry, for with the development of Plantation rubber, conditions, which a few years ago (such as in 1910 when Para rubber sold at nearly $3.00 per pound), looked as if they were likely to be permanent, have been relieved, and now there is no danger, at least for generations to come, that there will not be enough rubber to go around.

In the manufacture of all rubber goods the first stage is to reduce the rubber biscuits or sheets into a form in which the material may be handled by passing it through heavy steel rollers or crushers, after which it is dried and is mixed on heated rolls with the vulcanizing agent, sulphur, and other ingredients which are necessary to prepare it for the special purpose for which it is to be used. From this stage the processes vary according to the lines of goods to be manufactured, and when the article, whatever it may be, is finished and ready for the user, to the casual observer it bears no resemblance, nor appears to have any relation to the crude product, brought from so many thousand miles away to fill its place and do its part in one of the great industries of our nation.